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Navy Program Harbors Help for Wounded Warriors

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By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class (SW/AW) Darren M. Moore, Capt. James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center Public Affairs

NORTH CHICAGO, Ill.

– Imagine being away from home on the other side of the country – or even the world – and becoming so ill or injured you have to be taken to a medical center far from everything you are familiar with, potentially unable to return. Such is the case for a large portion of the U.S.

military's wounded warriors; but one program is helping make the transition not quite as difficult.

The Navy Wounded Warrior (NWW) – Safe Harbor program assists with the non-medical care of seriously wounded, ill and injured Sailors, Coast Guardsmen and their families as they transition to their new way of life.

At the Capt. James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in North Chicago, Ill., Lt. Michael A. Chalfant, a NWW – Safe Harbor representative and Midwest region coordinator for Fleet and Family Services, works hand-in-hand as an advocate with medical care providers to ensure service members and their families are taken care of as they continue through the recovery process.

"Anything they have concerns or questions about we try to take it and run," said Chalfant, a native of San Diego. "Some people have different goals, whether to medically retire or maybe



Navy recruit Stephan C. Vanostrand browses on his laptop computer thanks to the Navy Wounded Warrior (NWW) – Safe Harbor program at the Capt. James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center. The program worked with Salute Inc. to provide Vanostrand, who was diagnosed with aplastic anemia during Navy basic training at Recruit Training Command, with the laptop so he could communicate with his family in New York. The program assists enrolled wounded warriors during their recovery process as they transition back to duty or back into their communities. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Darren M. Moore)

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stay in service, but if we can lighten some of the load of what's on their mind or the burdens that they're having to lift up under this new diagnosis or new illness that they have, that's the goal – to make sure they know the Navy's there and trying to take care of them."

NWW – Safe Harbor is a voluntary program. Ill or injured service members are not required to seek assistance but may be referred to a representative or visit one on their own if interested. Commands also generate personnel casualty reports for each patient, which are distributed to the regional NWW – Safe Harbor representatives so they may contact them to offer assistance.

As a non-medical care provider, Chalfant supports each enrolled service member's recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration needs, whether it is back into duty or into their communities. Some areas of assistance include help in applying to schools or new jobs, addressing pay and personnel issues, developing comprehensive recovery plans, connecting service members to family resources, offering adaptive athletic opportunities and more.

"We can come alongside them, we can visit them, talk to them and continue to follow through with them, making sure everything is being taken care of," Chalfant said. "A big part of that is their quality of life and the challenges they face with their families, spouses or kids, or whatever transition to their life outside; that is really what the program is for, to help each and every Sailor transition to that new reality and support them in it."

NWW – Safe Harbor works with many organizations to provide assistance to wounded warriors, including Semper Fi Fund, Navy Relief Corps Society, Salute Inc., Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and others.

Chalfant said the Midwest region assists nearly 30 people a month.

Navy recruit Stephan C. Vanostrand, from Windsor, N.Y., said he appreciates the support he has received from NWW – Safe Harbor.

Vanostrand, who enlisted as undesignated, was progressing through the Navy's basic training at Recruit Training Command in Great Lakes, Ill., when he was hospitalized and diagnosed with aplastic anemia, after noticing a developing lack of strength and intense swelling from a cut on his hand.

"(Safe Harbor) has made sure I had everything they could possibly give me that I may have wanted ... they're always asking if I'm comfortable as I could be," Vanostrand said.

The NWW – Safe Harbor program worked with Salute Inc. to provide Vanostrand with a laptop computer so he could communicate with family while hospitalized hundreds of miles from home.

"Considering what actually happened, I feel like I couldn't have gotten luckier with the situation I happened to have been in with who was around to help me and all that," Vanostrand said.

Vanostrand said NWW – Safe Harbor has helped lighten the burden by providing consistent check-ups and taking care of everything for him.

"I feel real fortunate with how things happened after the diagnosis," Vanostrand said. "(Because of the laptop), I could communicate with most of my family. There would be times I was too out of it to talk. The laptop allowed me to contact them, to keep them informed, and to stay in touch when I felt up to it."

Chalfant said the program ensures nobody gets "lost in the shuffle," and though it is not always easy seeing what the service members and their families are going through, being able to help

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them makes it worth it.

"Sometimes you do deal with pretty tough situations, and that can be a little bit trying," Chalfant said. "But at the same time, and I'm sure anyone that dons the uniform would feel the same, if they have a chance to help a shipmate out they're going to take it even if it's a tough situation because it's rewarding to be able to boost up each other."

For more information on the NWW – Safe Harbor program, call the NWW Care Line at 855-628-9997, or visit <http://safeharbor.navylive.dodlive.mil>.



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